

How Pets Can Help You Cope with Disaster

(Courtesy of the Humane Society of the United States)

Many Turn to Pets in Times of Need

Anyone who has cared for a companion animal can list the benefits of sharing life with one. There's nothing quite like petting a purring cat nestled on your lap or returning home to a joyous welcome from a tail-wagging dog. Clearly, pets are friends and family. They also serve as healers.

Particularly in times of tragedy, pets are good for our emotional and physical health. Caring for a companion animal provides a sense of purpose and fulfillment and lessens feelings of loneliness and isolation in people of all ages. It's well known that relaxed, happy people do not become ill as often as those who suffer from stress and depression.

Animal companionship also helps lower a person's blood pressure and cholesterol levels. And studies show that having a dog increases survival rates in groups of patients who have suffered cardiac arrest. Dog walking, pet grooming, and even petting provide increased physical activity that strengthens the heart, improves blood circulation, and slows the loss of bone tissue. Put simply, pets aren't just good friends. They are good medicine.

These animals don't ask for much: just a short list of basics, such as food, shelter, veterinary care, and, of course, our companionship. Pets offer far more in return, especially during trying times. Even those little things such as the cat meowing for his morning meal or the dog crawling into bed with you remind us that life goes on and that we have much to live and be thankful for.